

Kitchen-diner

Lowering the floor creates interest and a change in ambience to the different parts of this space. 'I took inspiration from the textured natural materials used in Bert & May kitchens,' says Gemma. The couple designed the dining table, and the 1960s chairs and Brutalist vintage stools are from Vinterior. Brass accents include the Row pendant by Atelier Areti from Pamono

'The spaces have impact, but in a calm, warm way'

Choosing natural materials, authentic patinas and monochrome accents, Gemma Ruse and Xavier Sheriff have created a design-led home with a lived-in feel

Words JANE CRITTENDEN Photography ADAM SCOTT





Step inside...

Meet the owners

Designers Gemma Ruse and husband Xavier Sheriff, who run retail design agency StudioXAG, live here with their son Raffi, 3

House details

A five-bedroom Victorian terrace in Lower Clapton, east London

When they bought it

2017



Kitchen

Floor-to-ceiling glazing bookends the galley kitchen with views to the garden on both sides and ambient light from above. 'We wanted an honesty in materials, so chose oak cupboards by Oblique Furniture, a marble worktop and concrete flooring,' says Gemma



↑ Courtyard

The design of the courtyard built into the side return is based on the Japanese concept 'tsubo niwa', meaning 'small garden'. 'I really liked the idea, and it's a good way to bring greenery and brightness into the core of the house,' says Gemma

Spending their working life designing and fabricating wow-factor retail installations, Gemma Ruse and her husband Xavier decided to adopt a similar approach when it came to the renovation of their own home. 'We wanted to evoke the same kind of emotions, but in a quieter way, using honest materials and design details,' says Gemma.

The couple had been living in a two-bedroom flat in nearby Hackney for ten years when they began their search for a house suitable for starting a family. Initially, they discounted this four-storey Victorian terrace due to its poor state. 'The property was a mess, with a dodgy extension and loft conversion, Artex ceilings and layers of carpet,' recalls Gemma. 'It was more of a project than we had wanted, and our first thought was, "no way - we can't take this on".'

However, after viewing six similar houses in the area that were already renovated, Gemma and Xavier had a change of heart. With plenty of space, there was the possibility of turning the basement into an annexe →

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↑ **Balcony**

Just off the rear living room on the raised ground floor, the balcony overlooks the courtyard with a view to the kitchen below. Gemma chose the oversized Agate chandelier from Etsy as it plays with scale and proportion; the wicker stools are from Ikea

and they began to see the potential in the generously proportioned rooms. 'It was useful to see how other people had modernised their homes, and we picked up tips and tricks along the way,' says Gemma. 'In one house they'd created a vaulted ceiling in their bedroom, and we decided to do the same in our bathroom. Some of the houses, like ours, also had a rear reception room with an original balcony overlooking the garden. We thought this made an interesting feature – even more so as now ours overlooks our Japanese courtyard.'

The courtyard is located in the former side return, which sits between the original house and the new part – an L-shaped rear and side extension designed by architects Lizzie Webster and Joe Fraher of Fraher & Findlay. 'We wanted a contemporary →



Living room Bare plastered walls are a feature throughout the house, where alongside stripped-back cornicing it evokes a faded elegance to this more formal space. 'London restaurant Luca inspired our palette of pinks, wood, brass and linen,' says Gemma. The teal velvet Sleek sofa from Designers Guild was brought with the couple from their old flat, and the throw is from Slowdown Studio

connection with the outdoors – something we hadn't had with our flat before,' explains Gemma. 'I was really taken with Lizzie and Joe's idea of cooking in the kitchen framed by greenery from the courtyard on one side and the garden on the other, with a breeze filtering through. Working with a design concept like this really resonated with our way of working with our own clients.'

Although Gemma and Xavier had strong ideas about what they wanted to achieve in their new home – replacing the old extension, creating an indulgent bathroom, a lightwell above the staircase and a basement conversion – they looked to Lizzie and Joe for their architectural expertise. A genius solution was creating →



The big idea

Make a vaulted room feel cosier by painting the ceiling and walls in the same shade. A two-tone scheme with a darker colour above will also help create the illusion of reduced height, while a patterned or decorative floor design draws the eye downwards

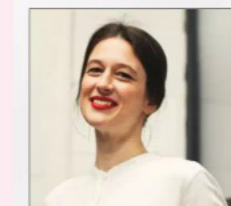


Bathroom
Exposing the ceiling to the roof gives this space an indulgent feel, enhanced by Little Greene's HoHo Green on the walls, Ca' Pietra's Paris marble mosaics on the floor and an Astonian Bateau bath from Aston Matthews. 'I love the combination of green with the white marble, brass and touches of black,' says Gemma

Hallway

'We held onto as much of the character as we could in the existing house,' says Gemma, deciding to stain and polish the original flooring while the staircase joinery was painted black





Gemma

“The imperfections of the bare plaster walls have a faded grandeur that really works in an old house like this”

access to the basement annexe from the courtyard, rather than through the house, as it gives us flexibility in how we use this area in the future,’ says Gemma. ‘We also dug the kitchen floor down by half a metre to give more height to the room, and it’s made such a difference to the feeling of space.’

The couple moved out while the year-long building project got underway to extend the house, reconfigure the poorly converted loft, as well as create a master bedroom with an en suite and dressing room from two small bedrooms. ‘We were really thankful we found Lizzie and Joe,’ says Gemma. ‘As well as having a great portfolio, they were the only architects who gave us a budget breakdown and the assurance they’d project-manage the details throughout the build – which was essential for us as we were busy running our business.’

While the renovations were underway, Gemma concentrated on putting together a large mood board for the fixtures, finishes and theme of their interiors. Honouring the existing →

Main bedroom

The reeded glass doors of the converted dressing room open up to the couple’s bedroom, where they reinstated a black marble Victorian fireplace and renovated the original wood floors. Gemma has accessorised with a Formakami pendant by Jaime Hayon for &Tradition from Nordic Nest, a Louka berber-style wool rug from La Redoute and throw by Ian Snow

Design details

A sliding door painted black ties in with the en-suite fixtures beyond, and Oblique Furniture made the headboard, which has been upholstered with Graffito fabric by Kelly Wearstler. 'I love her use of pattern, and followed this through with the en suite's graphic floor,' says Gemma



Style steal

Where standard hinged interior doors require space in which to swing open, sliding doors operate sideways, making them ideal for use in smaller rooms where space is at a premium. For an even more streamlined aesthetic, a pocket door conveniently slides into a compartment in the wall, making it invisible from both sides when open

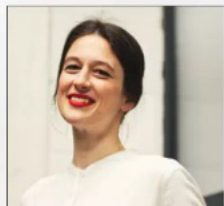
house was key, reinstating original period features where needed but using a contemporary aesthetic for any new additions. 'We'd lived in a colourful flat before, but this time I wanted any colour we used to be low key with the clean lines of design,' says Gemma. The patinas come from authentic materials like wood, marble and brass set within a framework of black joinery and monochrome patterns, and a trio of designers influenced her ideas. 'I love Kelly Wearstler's artistic take on glamour – the forms and materials she works with make my heart sing,' she says. 'I'm captivated by Dimore Studio's colour palette and the way they mix materials, while Chan & Eayrs' craftsmanship detail screams jaw-dropping luxury.'

Like the house itself, lighting and furniture are a combination of vintage and new designer pieces, many by product-designer friends from the →



↑ En suite

Previously a bedroom, Gemma went for a contemporary interpretation of Art Deco style with a honed basalt stone basin from Marble Mosaics, Alana gold mirror from Made.com and black-and-white floor tiles. 'I worked out a unique pattern that I was very passionate about getting right!' she says. The Lips artwork by Caroline Tomlinson is from Print Club London



Gemma

“We’d lived in a colourful flat before, but this time I wanted low-key colour with clean lines”

↑ Raffi’s room

Painting the ceiling in Zoffany’s Lazuli from Designerpaint, and using glow-in-the-dark stickers gives Raffi’s bedroom a starry night sky feel. The mustard Orcul wool rug is from La Redoute

couple’s student days at university of the arts Central Saint Martins – Dyke & Dean bathroom lighting, Atelier Areti kitchen lighting and Swarf Hardware’s kitchen cupboard handles. Lizzie and Joe also designed seating to mould seamlessly into the marble kitchen surfaces, with Gemma and Xavier designing the dining table themselves.

Plastered walls that have been left bare of paint are a design feature throughout the property, which were inspired by a friend’s business, the Lighthouse café, near to where

the couple live. At first, Gemma had only intended to keep the walls undecorated in their bedroom to unite with the en suite’s ‘Tadelakt plastered walls. ‘I grew to love the warmth and calmness in the pale pink plaster tones, and as we got to the end of the project, I decided to leave the walls bare everywhere else in the house,’ she says. ‘The texture and imperfections have a lived-in, loved look with a faded grandeur that really works in an old house like this. Our home has impact in a calm, warm way – we’re very happy here.’